

Asked, 'How Are You...?' Sirhan Says, 'Beautiful'

Defendant Appears to Enjoy Trial

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The slim, darkly handsome young man accused of murdering Sen. Robert F. Kennedy has been on trial for his life nine days. "Beautiful," he says.

Sirhan Bishara Sirhan appears to have enjoyed every minute of it. His courtroom demeanor has remained jaunty since the trial began Jan. 7, seven months after the New York senator was shot at the Ambassador Hotel.

"If I were in his place," deputy prosecutor David N. Fitts said last week, "I certainly wouldn't grin at the jury."

But Sirhan, 24, dapper in a new blue suit with narrow, cuffless trousers, smiles at everyone who will return the gesture.

He frequently rocks back in his big leather swivel chair to wave at his mother, Mary, and two brothers, Adel and Munir, who are seated every day in the back row of the tiny, tightly guarded eight-floor courtroom.

Sirhan seems to have developed affection for his three attorneys, especially balding, spectacled Russell E. Parsons, 73, the first lawyer to take the case.

The defendant remains close to Parsons every moment in court, often whispering into the attorney's ear and patting him on the back.

Parsons visits Sirhan often in his 13th-floor jail cell, taking him cigarettes and other small items. Before the trial started, Sirhan reportedly smoked six packs of cigarettes a day.

When Parsons spells chief defense counsel Grant B. Cooper in quizzing prospective jurors, Sirhan follows the elderly man's remarks intently.

A court official admonished Sirhan to remain seated Friday when he stood up abruptly to talk to Parsons as the attorney was addressing a juror.

Two of the courtroom's front

rows have been occupied by prospective jurors. Most of the other seats are taken by newsmen, with about a dozen reserved for the public.

The several women reporters in court each day have grown accustomed to Sirhan's admiring glances, and the presence of a comely spectator will attract the defendant's full attention.

When a young girl in a miniskirt walked from the court last week, Sirhan raised himself by the armrest of his chair for a better view, then relayed his satisfaction to Parsons with a secretive chuckle.

As the defendant's dark eyes dart back and forth from jury spectators, the grim work of the trial continues.

"Would you have the courage to come back here and tell this young man he must die in the gas chamber?" prosecutor Fitts asks a prospective juror.

Sirhan leans forward on the counsel table and smiles at the juror.

Neither the reference to the death penalty nor the mention of Sen. Kennedy's name elicits any detectable emotion from the defendant.

As the trial wound up its first week Friday, defense attorney Cooper put his arm around Sir-

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han's shoulders and asked, "Beautiful," the defendant replied. "How are you doing, Sirhan?"